

Masthead Logo

The Palimpsest

Volume 12 | Number 11

Article 3

11-1-1931

Jean Marie Cardinal

William J. Petersen

Follow this and additional works at: <https://ir.uiowa.edu/palimpsest>

Part of the [United States History Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Petersen, William J. "Jean Marie Cardinal." *The Palimpsest* 12 (1931), 414-420.

Available at: <https://ir.uiowa.edu/palimpsest/vol12/iss11/3>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the State Historical Society of Iowa at Iowa Research Online. It has been accepted for inclusion in The Palimpsest by an authorized administrator of Iowa Research Online. For more information, please contact lib-ir@uiowa.edu.

Jean Marie Cardinal

Jean Marie Cardinal was in a dilemma. For days he had paddled up the turbulent Mississippi with his Pawnee wife and his faithful Indian slave, searching for a suitable place to settle. Wild game was plentiful but, though he had ascended the Mississippi as far as the Cannon River, the only desirable home site he had seen was just above the mouth of the Wisconsin River. Should he go on or return? He decided to turn back and settle at what is now Prairie du Chien. Throughout their journey the three adventurers had often been forced to wait for the numerous herds of buffalo to swim across the stream before their canoe could pass in safety.

Legend has it that Jean Marie Cardinal was the first white man to settle at Prairie du Chien — probably about the time that the French and Indian wars began. In any event it is not likely that Cardinal welcomed the cession of all the rich land east of the Mississippi to England. Moreover, the sudden appearance of two aggressive English trappers, Abraham Lansing and his son, doubtless irked the Frenchman. Were these prosperous traders planning to secure a monopoly of the fur trade and drive the French out before their country had actually taken formal pos-

session? Grudgingly, perhaps, Jean Marie and a companion consented to act as guides and servants for Lansing on a trading excursion into the northern wilds. A quarrel ensued, hot words were exchanged, and Lansing and his son were killed. Fearful of English justice, Cardinal hastened southward, stole into Prairie du Chien to get his wife and family, and then fled into Spanish territory.

Meanwhile Spain, with characteristic tardiness, did not assume command of the western portion of Louisiana until 1769. Possession of land in the Mississippi Valley, including the Iowa country, placed the Spanish government in the peculiar position of ruling over a French population and attempting to ward off intruding French and British Canadians and colonial Americans. Between 1763 and 1803 the French formed a preponderant element in this domain. Unswerving loyalty was essential if any foreign power were to rule so large a territory.

Early in 1770 Governor Don Alexander O'Reilly published twelve regulations which exhibited the general intention and policy of Spain regarding the disposition of the public domain by means of land grants. These were to be made in the name of the king by the governor-general of the province who was to appoint a surveyor to fix the boundary of the grant in the presence of three witnesses. Copies of the survey signed by the witnesses and surveyor were to be de-

posited with the government, the governor-general, and the grantee.

While these regulations were particularly important in Lower Louisiana, the Iowa country and the lead mines were an object of regard for many an avaricious eye. Indeed, on July 5, 1769, even before the publication of the regulations, Martin Miloney Duralde petitioned Louis St. Ange de Bellerive, French Captain-Commandant of the Illinois country, for a grant of land about a hundred and sixty leagues above St. Louis or eighty leagues above the Des Moines River. This site must have been in the vicinity of Dubuque. Duralde declared that he was a resident of St. Louis and had been informed by several traders of the discovery of a lead mine on the bank of the Mississippi in French territory. He asked for a tract "three arpents in front, by the ordinary depth, in order that he might explore it, make a garden, and procure the necessary fuel" for his workmen without being interrupted in his operations. St. Ange granted the petition but apparently Duralde never settled upon his grant or mined for lead.

At least two other men seem to have mined lead in Iowa before Julien Dubuque arrived. Father Samuel Mazzuchelli, a missionary who came to the Upper Mississippi Valley in the early eighteen thirties, wrote in his memoirs: "The lead mines to the west of the Mississippi as far as $42\frac{1}{2}^{\circ}$ N. had been worked at first

by Mr. Long, then by his successor in the Indian trade, M. Cardinal, followed then by Mr. Dubuque. This account was given in 1835 by an aged Canadian, an octogenarian, who during the course of about twenty years had been in the service of the last mentioned gentleman." Nothing more is known of the mysterious Mr. Long but it has been suggested that possibly he may be identified with the L'Ange family of Prairie du Chien whose name was often spelled in the old records as Lange or Longe.

But Jean Marie Cardinal! What strange fate had led him to return so close to the scene of the murder of Abraham Lansing and his son? Following his flight to the Illinois country in 1763, Cardinal had lived for a time at St. Phillippe but later had moved to St. Louis, the rapidly growing fur-trade center of the West. There Cardinal established his family. He was happy with his Indian wife, Marie Anne, whom he had found years before, probably while on a trading expedition up the Missouri. On May 30, 1776, his marriage was formally solemnized in the church at St. Louis, and his children were baptized. At that time Paul was only a little more than a year old while Genevieve was twenty-one. Of the others, Charlotte Ursule was eighteen, Margarete was ten, Suzanne and Catherine were eight, and Felicete and Jean Marie were five.

From St. Louis, Cardinal ranged deep into the

Upper Mississippi country and far up the valley of the Missouri. During the course of his wanderings he probably stumbled upon Perrot's old mines and determined to work the diggings. The outbreak of the American Revolution may have served as a spur to such activity although it is possible that he began his activity even before 1776. In any event evidences of his work were found by Julien Dubuque upon his arrival. Substantial roads, the Indians declared, had been built for transportation of ore by Spaniards.

Cardinal apparently remained in this vicinity unmolested for several years. In the spring of 1780, with Spain aiding the colonies in the war for American independence, the British determined to attack Spanish Louisiana. St. Louis was to be the objective of an expedition which was planned by Lieutenant-Governor Patrick Sinclair at Michilimackinac. Captain Emmanuel Hesse was ordered to collect a force of men and supplies and proceed to the attack of St. Louis without delay.

The British bent every effort to insure a victory. Learning of the presence of an armed boat on the Upper Mississippi, Hesse sent some troops to intercept it. Led by Lieutenant Alexander Kay, they easily captured the boat and its crew of "twelve men & a Rebel Commissary" at the mouth of the Turkey River. Kay and his motley array of Indian allies then proceeded to the lead mines where they surprised and

captured "seventeen Spanish & Rebel Prisoners, & stopp'd Fifty Tonns of Lead ore" from falling into the enemy's hands. An assortment of provisions, peltries, tobacco and rum was also seized in the two skirmishes. Lieutenant-Governor Sinclair was jubilant and immediately dispatched a letter to his superior imparting the news and adding: "A part of the Menomins who are come here, some Puants, Sacks & Rhenards go immediately to watch the Lead mines. Orders will be published at the Illenois for no person to go there, who looks for receiving Quarter, and the Indians have orders to give none to any without a British Pass." Iowa and the lead mines were playing a colorful rôle in the American Revolution.

Fortunately for the Americans, a number of miners escaped down the Mississippi to St. Louis. Jean Marie Cardinal was probably among them, though his wife and small son seem to have been captured. Hastening down stream, they arrived at St. Louis in time to warn the inhabitants of the impending invasion and enable the citizens to throw up a "Breastwork round a Store House" in preparation for the defense.

On the second of May "Seven Hundred & fifty men including Traders, servants and Indians" left Prairie du Chien and proceeded down the Mississippi to St. Louis. They must have formed a shifting scene of color — the brilliant scarlet uniforms of the British soldiers, the picturesque homespuns and furskins of

the traders, the splash of savage finery emblazoned in every conceivable fashion on blankets, canoes, naked bodies, and equipment. Only the glint of rifle and sabre in the sunlight would have divulged the true character of the expedition to a possible witness at the lead mines as they passed.

When the flotilla reached St. Louis on May 25, 1780, they found to their surprise a Spanish-French force of twenty-nine regulars and two hundred and eighty-one villagers behind strong entrenchments. A furious assault was launched, hand-to-hand fighting occurred at several points, but in the end the British were repulsed on all sides and forced to retreat northward. In front of the village fought Jean Marie Cardinal, unmindful of his own safety in his desperate effort to defend St. Louis and perhaps secure revenge upon the hated British. During the course of the struggle he was taken prisoner by some Indians and was mortally wounded while attempting to make his escape. Recaptured, he remained a prisoner but a short time, for he died at the "Beaver Pounds" a few miles from St. Louis. Jean Marie Cardinal was probably the only Iowan to give his life in the cause of American independence.

WILLIAM J. PETERSEN